

The Year of the Rat:
Images of Betrayal in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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“The Year of the Rat: Images of Betrayal in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*”

As George Orwell pondered a title for the novel that was to be named *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a novel that makes extensive use of the image of the rat, it is interesting to note that the year 1984 was, itself, the Year of the Rat according to the Chinese Zodiac; further, when Orwell was writing his novel in 1948, it was another Year of the Rat. While the Zodiac suggests that those born under the sign are meticulous, intelligent, charismatic, charming, ambitious, practical, industrious, and eloquent, it also suggests that they are controlling, resentful, manipulative, cruel, vengeful, stubborn, power-hungry, and critical (*Wikipedia*). In western tradition, the rat is also held as a metaphor for betrayal, as in the verb “to rat,” or “[t]o desert one's party, side, or cause... to turn traitor” (*OED* 2a), or as in the noun, “[a] police informer; an informer in a prison” (*OED* 4f). Psychoanalysts suggest that “[t]he resemblance between men and rats has often been pointed out, usually in relation to a tribute to their similar intraspecific destructive competitiveness” (Schengold). In any event, the rat is a metaphor for a person or action intricately linked with betrayal. It is little wonder that Orwell’s protagonist, Winston Smith, should be terrified by these creatures; for as will be shown, to the extent that he demonstrates some of their negative traits, the ‘rat’ can be seen as a symbolic projection of one of Winston’s most salient attributes, the capacity for betrayal.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is an interesting examination of betrayal, not only in that the society ruled by the Party perversely champions as its ideals betrayal, distrust, and hatred, but also in the history of Winston—who ostensibly laments the loss of traditional values, such as integrity and self-sacrifice—which itself plays out as a series of devastating betrayals. Because of Winston’s ability to lie to himself about his early

betrayals, the limited third-person narrator—which Abrams defines as a narrative strategy whereby “[t]he narrator tells the story in the third person, but stays inside the confines of what is perceived, thought, remembered, and felt by a single character” (242)—cannot explain the significant gap in the narrative at the momentous occasion when his mother disappears, an event which Winston is never able to recall completely.

At the heart of the Party’s manipulation is the corruption of the bonds of loyalty within the family. Such betrayal receives special attention in the many examples of corrupted family life in the novel, and it is this particular corruption of family values that haunts Winston in his dreams and in his memories of his family. With his relationship with Julia, Winston makes a stand against the Party’s corrupting influence on family loyalty, and as this essay will argue, attempts to rectify his own betrayal of his family by recreating an idealized nuclear family home in the room above Charrington’s shop (the room). By manipulating Julia into playing the role of loving wife, Winston goes further in his rebellion than ever before, but it sets the stage for another set of vicious betrayals, more devastating than those in Winston’s previous experience. Creating a functioning family in the room allows Winston a chance to redeem himself for this painful, undefined transgression. This paper will also provide evidence that, as a result of their coupling in the room, Julia becomes pregnant, and subsequently gives birth to Winston’s child in the Ministry of Love; further, just as Winston betrays Julia by demanding that her body be exchanged for his in room 101 before the rats, so too does Julia betray Winston in her betrayal of her own child, in the ultimate betrayal of his effort to construct a family free from the corrupting force of the Party, and—symbolically—from his own childhood transgression against his family.

The very language of Oceania, Newspeak, helps to set up the culture of betrayal in Oceania. The slogans of the party—“war is peace,” “freedom is slavery,” and “ignorance is strength”—themselves suggest a linguistic betrayal of meaning. As Syme describes the “beautiful” destruction of words to Winston, he asks, “what justification is there for a word which is simply the opposite of some other word?” (54) Syme goes on to suggest that “[e]ven the literature of the Party will change. How could you have a slogan like ‘freedom is slavery’ when the concept of freedom has been abolished?” (56). The slogans’ paradoxes are an example of the “great wastage” (54) of words that the eleventh edition of the Newspeak Dictionary is designed to abolish, as Syme demands of Winston: “Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?” (55) With the elimination of words, Newspeak restricts the potential for what the Party considers to be heretical thought. Language as we know it, however, exists to convey ideas. The attempt by the Party to eliminate the possibility of heresy through language itself betrays the purpose of language as communication. The paradoxical nature of the Party’s slogans and the pursuit of the elimination of heresy through Newspeak depict the very culture of betrayal that exists in Oceania.¹

Emmanuel Goldstein is a complex tool of propaganda in Oceania, especially in the Two Minutes Hate:

Emmanuel Goldstein was the renegade and backslider who once, long ago (how long ago, nobody quite remembered), had been one of the leading figures of the

¹The notion that language controls thought is absurd, however, for even if there are no words for frequenting a prostitute, tearing down a poster of Big Brother, or betraying Oceania as a Eurasian spy, surely the acts described by these words, and the symbolism of their performance, is expressed, even without the Newspeak words to express them. Orwell capitulates this point when Winston and Julia meet for the first time in the clearing, when Winston reveals that “when she flung [her clothing] aside it was with the same magnificent gesture by which a whole civilization seemed to be annihilated” (131); it is clear that, even if Winston and Julia had not the linguistic ability to express such an action, the potential for heresy continues in this heretical non-verbal gesture.

Party, almost on a level with Big Brother himself, and then had engaged in counter-revolutionary activities, had been condemned to death and had mysteriously escaped and disappeared. The programmes of the Two Minutes Hate varied from day to day, but there was none in which Goldstein was not the principal figure. (13-4)

By placing Goldstein at the centre of the Two Minutes Hate, the Party evinces a culture of betrayal, as Goldstein is, as an individual and as a symbol, intrinsically linked with betrayal, while he may be no more real than Winston's invented Comrade Ogilvy. Even the supposed underground, counter-revolutionary movement in Oceania is embodied in Goldstein: "The Brotherhood its name was supposed to be. There were also whispered stories of a terrible book, a compendium of all the heresies, of which Goldstein was the author and which circulated clandestinely here and there" (15). It appears that the book, like *The Brotherhood*, may well simply be a tool used by the Thought Police to identify, to capture, and to process possible thought-criminals, as is exemplified through O'Brien's relationship with Winston. Goldstein's book—like the Two Minutes Hate—is, thus, a tool of both transgression against the Party, and for enabling the Party to ferret out such transgression, as it provides a vehicle whereby betrayal of the Party can be exposed.

The language surrounding Winston as an adult suggests that it is he who is, metaphorically, a rat. When Winston and Julia visit O'Brien to join the Brotherhood, O'Brien asks the pair if they can agree to participate in acts which involve various forms of treachery and betrayal:

'You are prepared to give your lives.... to commit murder.... To commit acts of sabotage which may cause the death of hundreds of innocent people.... To betray your country to foreign powers.... To cheat, to forge, to blackmail, to corrupt the minds of children, to distribute habit-forming drugs, to encourage

prostitution, to disseminate venereal diseases.... To throw sulphuric acid in a child's face—are you prepared to do that?' (179-80)

Winston readily agrees to this list of depraved acts, many of which involve implicit or explicit forms of betrayal. It is little wonder that later, when O'Brien replays the conversation for Winston in the Ministry of Love (283), Winston finds his words—once defiant—now humiliating, since they describe horrible acts of betrayal similar to those that he perceives in his society which had earlier met his disdain. Winston's defiance in the face of O'Brien's treatment of him rings hollow in the light of his own words, and his proclaimed willingness to betray his fellow citizens makes him, at the very least, a potential rat.

Winston betrays Julia in a way that he understands undermines their previous declarations of mutual feelings. In the society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, betrayal is the way of life for citizens because it has been equated with Party loyalty, so when Winston and Julia discuss their inevitable capture, they establish their own condition for betrayal, since they believe it is inevitable that they should have to go through the motions of betraying each other in the conventional sense. Winston explains: "Confession is not betrayal. What you say or do doesn't matter: only feelings matter. If they could make me stop loving you—that would be the real betrayal" (173). In the awful scene in room 101, it is clear that Winston transgresses this condition for real betrayal, as he—under torture—realizes that "[t]here was one and only one way to save himself. He must interpose another human being, the *body* of another human being, between [himself] and the rats" (299). When he realizes that he can use Julia as the only suitable stand-in for him, he immediately violates their agreed conditions for betrayal: "Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don't care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the

bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!” (300). Orwell’s use of punctuation here reveals the very moment of betrayal. Winston suddenly knows that Julia is the one whom O’Brien wishes him to betray, but the desperate shouting, with its exclamation points, are motivated merely by the intense emotions excited by his incredible fear of rats. The two lines in this passage, lacking exclamation points, demonstrate a clearer mind; it is in these lines where—with the knowledge that the threat has passed, and that he has just given O’Brien what he has surely wanted as his capitulation—Winston betrays Julia in the very terms that they had established in the supposed safety of the room, by willingly ceasing to love her.

Julia must also have betrayed Winston in a similar manner. When Julia and Winston meet in the park after they have been released by the Ministry of Love, Julia baldly admits that there has been a violation of their terms of betrayal:

‘Sometimes,’ she said, ‘they threaten you with something—something you can’t stand up to, can’t even think about. And then you say, “Don’t do it to me, do it to someone else, do it to so-and-so.” And perhaps you might pretend, afterwards, that it was only a trick and that you just said it to make them stop and didn’t really mean it. But that isn’t true. At the time when it happens you do mean it. You think there’s no other way of saving yourself, and you’re quite willing to save yourself that way. You *want* it to happen to the other person. You don’t give a damn what they suffer. All you care about is yourself.’ (305)

This monologue outlines the totality of their mutual betrayal. Winston is capable only of agreement, and makes no attempt to deny the terrible veracity of her statement. Julia’s continual use of “you” in this passage must be referring to some experience that she has personally endured—an experience that she must remember from a distance, as she does when she uses the impersonal ‘you’ instead of the personal ‘I’—and cannot simply be

decrying Winston's apparent abandonment of their agreement in the face of his terrible fear of rats, which would not be betrayal in their sense. In order to understand Winston's betrayal as 'real betrayal,' she must have been placed in a similar situation through the course of which she must also have violated their conditions for betrayal, recognizing as she did the necessity of such a betrayal for her very survival, and that, further, the nature of her betrayal was, in their own terms, 'real' and irreparable. Both Winston and Julia, it is clear, have metaphorically become rats in that they have "turned traitor" on each other, and in that, through this action, they have also become "informer[s] in a prison."

The rat is more than simply a metaphor for the child Winston, whose physical behaviour in his memories echoes that of the rats that he has come to fear as an adult. As Winston remembers the happy time he spent with his family in the closing chapter, he recalls that

The boredom of the two children in the dark, closed bedroom became unbearable. Winston whined and grizzled, made futile demands for food, fretted about the room pulling everything out of place and kicking the wainscoting until the neighbours banged on the wall, while the younger child wailed intermittently. (309)

Winston's actions reduce him to the level of an animal as he whines and grizzles, finding no better way to vocalize his frustration. Further, this passage recalls Winston's very recent experience in room 101 with the rats. In his description of the rats, Winston draws unconscious parallels between this childhood experience and the experience of the rats: "There was an outburst of squeals from the cage. It seemed to reach Winston from far away. The rats were fighting; they were trying to get each other through the partition" (298). The rats in room 101 fight both because they are suffering in their claustrophobic cage and because they are starving, just as in Winston's "faraway" recollection of his

childhood he found the room claustrophobic, and made a commotion over his hunger. From Winston's other memories, it is clear that he mimicked the behaviour of rats in his scavenging for food as a child:

He remembered long afternoons spent with other boys in scrounging round dustbins and rubbish heaps, picking out the ribs of cabbage leaves, potato peelings, sometimes even stale breadcrust from which they carefully scraped away the cinders; and also in the waiting for passing of trucks which traveled over a certain route and were known to carry cattle feed, and which, when they jolted over the bad patches in the road, sometimes spilt a few fragments of oil-cake. (168)

The "dustbins and rubbish heaps" are the domain of the rat. By placing the boys there, Orwell draws a distinct parallel between Winston and the other boys, and rats. If the placement of the boys in the rubbish heap were not enough to draw this parallel, then the cunning with which the boys follow the trucks to get "cattle feed" is: The very oil-cake which is prized by the boys is food for animals, which reduces them metaphorically to the level of the animal, and given their placement in the trash, and their activities, there can be no doubt that that animal is the rat, because of their clever rat-like collection of food in these difficult conditions.

Winston's work at the Ministry of Truth demonstrates the corrupted nature of truth in the society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and provides further evidence of his capacity for betrayal. The narrator reveals that in Oceania, "[a]ll history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and re-inscribed exactly as often as was necessary" (42). Winston's job is to so rectify the past as to make it more congruent with the present need, and to make it appear to have correctly predicted the future. Winston's work comes to him on slips of paper, of which he observes

Even the written instructions which Winston received, and which he invariably got rid of as soon as he had dealt with them, never stated or implied that an act of forgery was to be committed.... But actually, he thought... it was not even forgery. It was merely the substitution of one piece of nonsense for another. Most of the material that you were dealing with had no connection with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection that is contained in a direct lie. (43)

The workings of the Ministry of Truth are principally concerned with the betrayal of the truth, but as in the example Winston gives of the production numbers for boots, these mistruths are abstract: “Very likely no boots had been produced at all. Likelier still, nobody knew how many boots had been produced, much less cared” (44). In the item “times 14.2.84 miniplenty malquoted chocolate rectify” (41), however, Winston must create a fabrication that will undoubtedly have a direct impact on the citizens of Oceania.² In the canteen, Winston hears his own lie recited back to him by the telescreen:

It appeared that there had even been demonstrations to thank Big Brother for raising the chocolate ration to twenty grammes a week. And only yesterday, he reflected, it had been announced that the ration was to be *reduced* to twenty grammes a week. Was it possible that they could swallow that, after only twenty-four hours? Yes, they swallowed it. (61-2)

In his usual zeal for his work, Winston has undoubtedly changed the story to show an increase rather than a decrease “so as to allow for the usual claim that the quota had been over-fulfilled,” (43) as he had earlier with the production figures for boots. Winston is intimately aware that his work is a betrayal of truth, and that he is betraying his comrades when he commits such acts of forgery, but he is shocked only at the ease with which the

² Although the actual falsification of the report on chocolate is not described in the text, it is in keeping with Winston’s other work.

lie is accepted by Parsons and by Syme, “in some more complex way, involving doublethink” (62).

While Winston appears to condemn the Party for its duplicitous treatment of history, he does not seem at all bothered by his own betrayal of history; indeed we are told that “Winston’s greatest pleasure in life was in his work” (46). Winston knows very well that the official propaganda is false, as his employment has depended upon such falsification, yet he complains that “the only evidence [that history had been falsified] was the mute protest in your bones, the instinctual feelings that the conditions you lived in were intolerable and at some other time they must have been different” (76-7). When Winston appears to be disheartened at the beginning of his workday, and issues “the deep, unconscious sigh which not even the nearness of the telescreen could prevent him from uttering” (40), the narrator reveals that, in reality, Winston’s work sometimes requires the production of “delicate pieces of forgery in which you had nothing to guide you except your knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say. Winston was good at this kind of thing” (46). When, during Hate Week, the Party reveals that Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia, and that Eurasia has always been their ally, Winston is forced to work overtime at the Ministry of Truth, where again his position regarding the falsification of truth is revealed:

In so far as he had time to remember it, he was not troubled by the fact that every word he murmured into the speakwrite, every stroke of his ink-pencil, was a deliberate lie. He was as anxious as anyone else in the Department that the forgery should be perfect. (190)

Though Winston’s ‘search for truth’ suggests that he is against the falsification of records, he is, indeed, very good at this very falsification, as is further demonstrated in his subtle

dealings in eliminating the ‘unperson’ Comrade Withers from the public records in the form of a transcription of a speech Big Brother had made in his honour:

He might turn the speech into the usual denunciation of traitors and thought-criminals, but that was a little too obvious; while to invent a victory at the front, or some triumph of over-production in the Ninth Three-Year plan, might complicate the records too much. What was needed was a piece of pure fantasy. Suddenly there sprang into his mind, ready made as it were, the image of a certain Comrade Ogilvy, who had recently died in battle, in heroic circumstances. There were occasions when Big Brother devoted his Order for the Day to commemorating some humble, rank-and-file Party member whose life and death he held up as an example worthy to be followed. Today he should commemorate Comrade Ogilvy. It was true that there was no such person as Comrade Ogilvy, but a few lines of print and a couple of faked photographs would bring him into existence. (48-9)

Even as Winston deftly erases Comrade Withers from the pages of history, and hence from having ever ‘existed’ in the records and, by extension, in the society of the Party, so too is he able—with great pains as to make the forgery realistic, believable, and easy to execute—to invent a human being, Comrade Ogilvy, whose very existence is a complete fabrication which, like the production numbers for boots, “had no connection with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection that is contained in a direct lie.” While Winston can on occasion hypocritically bemoan the dearth of truth in his society, he is one of those specialized few who is practised in the art of such falsifications of truth, and ultimately earns his living by making such betrayals believable and easily executable.

Winston admires the memory of his mother precisely because she was capable of loving her family in a way that he believes is no longer possible, because the Party has

prohibited the family intimacy and altruism that she had embodied. In a dream that Winston has of his mother early in the text, the narrator remarks that “[t]he thing that now suddenly struck Winston was that his mother’s death, nearly thirty years ago, had been tragic and sorrowful in a way that was no longer possible” (32). The narrator continues: “Tragedy, he perceived, belonged to the ancient time, to a time when there was privacy, love and friendship, and when members of a family stood by one another without needing to know the reason” (32). The present futility of such values is early demonstrated in the propaganda film that Winston describes in the “stream of rubbish” (11) he issues forth when he opens his diary:

then you saw a lifeboat full of children with a helicopter hovering over it. there was a middleaged woman... sitting up in the bow with a little boy about three years old in her arms. little boy screaming with fright and hiding his head between her breasts as if he were trying to burrow right into her and the woman putting her arms round him and comforting him... as if she thought her arms could keep the bullets off him. (10)

Winston writes in his diary that, when the boat is spectacularly destroyed in the film, “there was a lot of applause from the party seats but a woman down in the prole part suddenly started kicking up a fuss” (11), a “fuss” which he dismisses contemptuously as merely a “typical prole reaction” (11). The contrast between the reaction of the prole woman—who is representative of a class still allowed to exist in traditional, uncorrupted family units, and has maintained the vestiges of the traditional values—and that of the Party members (including Winston), for whom the uncorrupted family unit has been abolished, demonstrates the disconnect between Party members and the kind of loyalty that Winston secretly admires in his late mother. When Winston suggests that his mother “had sacrificed herself to a conception of loyalty that was private and unalterable,” he is

quite evidently correct that loyal behaviour like his mother's "could not happen today" (32), at least not without the tragic consequences suffered by the woman illustrated in the film. Like the woman in the boat, Winston later says of his mother: "Her feelings were her own, and could not be altered from the outside. It would not have occurred to her that an action which is ineffectual thereby becomes meaningless" (171). But while Winston claims to admire his mother for her impeccable standards to her family loyalty, he appears to be free from admiration for the woman in the film.

The tableau with the skull-faced man in the holding room at the Ministry of Love also provides an example of a betrayal of one's family in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that serves as a prelude for Winston's later betrayal of Julia. When the skull-faced man is brought into the holding room, Winston notices that "[t]he man was dying of starvation" (247). Yet when he is offered "a grimy piece of bread" (247) by the fat, chinless man, the skull-faced man proves to have great internal fortitude: "The skull-faced man... quickly thrust his hands behind his back, as though demonstrating to all the world that he refused the gift" (247). Despite his very evident hunger, the skull-faced man has mastered himself, and is immune to the temptations of immediate gratification; yet as soon he is ordered to go to Room 101, he loses this composure: "'Do anything to me!' he yelled. 'You've been starving me for weeks. Finish it off and let me die'" (248). In a final act of desperation, the skull-faced man's behaviour anticipates the betrayal between Winston and Julia when he exclaims "I've got a wife and three children. The biggest of them isn't six years old. You can take the whole lot of them and cut their throats in front of my eyes, and I'll stand by and watch it. But not room 101!" (249). With nothing left to offer, the skull-faced man betrays his family, and—as is the case with Winston's betrayal

of Julia—the punctuation used by Orwell once again demonstrates this clear betrayal: The lack of exclamation marks denotes clear resolve in the midst of his quite evident panic. The fact that it is a final effort to offer his family up in his stead suggests that this is a fresh betrayal; why else would he offer it up now, and so hopeful of success? Further, the offering made by skull-faced man would mean nothing to him unless he too had been attempting to maintain uncorrupted loyalty to his family, since such an offering would only be substantial if he had only recently had a feeling of connection with them.

The Parsons family is a clearer, more developed example of family betrayal in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. When Mrs Parsons comes to Winston's door, he points out that she is, by her nature, maternal: “‘Mrs’ was a word somewhat discountenanced by the Party—you were supposed to call everyone ‘comrade’—but with some women one used it instinctively” (22). While “Mrs” is the title conventionally given to married women, in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, marriage exists solely for the sake of reproduction, so this title must mean that Mrs Parsons is, by her very nature, quintessentially maternal. The nature of the family is further explained as Winston muses, that “[w]ith those children... that wretched woman must lead a life of terror. Another year, two years, and they would be watching her night and day for symptoms of unorthodoxy” (26). The Parsons children indeed prove remarkably adept at discerning unorthodoxy, if only in play, as they accuse Winston, who has just begun to write in his diary and most likely feels guilt, of being a thought-criminal: “‘You’re a traitor!’ yelled the boy. ‘You’re a thought-criminal! You’re a Eurasian spy! [...] Suddenly they were both leaping round him [...] It was somehow slightly frightening, like the gambolling of tiger cubs which will soon grow up into man-eaters’” (25). The children’s strong reaction to Winston

demonstrates the power that they have in discovering even slight deviations from orthodoxy. Winston's predictions prove true—almost—as it is Parsons, not his wife, who is later denounced by the children:

‘It was my little daughter,’ said Parsons with a sort of doleful pride. ‘She listened at the keyhole. Heard what I was saying, and nipped off to the patrols the very next day. Pretty smart for a nipper of seven, eh? I don’t bear her any grudge for it. In fact I’m proud of her. It shows I brought her up in the right spirit, anyway.’ (245)

The Parsons children prove every bit as dangerous as Winston has imagined. Parsons' pride in his daughter's betrayal of him further demonstrates the depths to which family life—as exemplified by the Parsons family—has been made to fall in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as betrayal has become the principal criterion of both family life and good citizenship.

Through Winston's experience with the Parsons family, the reader is made aware of his view of children: “Nearly all children nowadays were horrible” (26). Parson's traitorous daughter has become the “eavesdropping little sneak—‘child hero’” (27) that further demonstrates the corruption of family values in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Winston's instinctive distrust of children is based on their potential for betrayal:

It was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children. And with good reason, for hardly a week passed in which the *Times* did not carry a paragraph describing how some eavesdropping little sneak—‘child hero’ was the phrase generally used—had overheard some compromising remark and denounced his parents to the Thought Police. (26-7)

But with no children of his own, Winston has had no real reason to be fearful of them. Given this, it is far more likely that his own experiences and behavior as a child produce this anxiety: “His mother's memory tore at his heart because she had died loving him,

when he was too young and selfish to love her in return” (32). Winston’s distrust of children ultimately stems from his own dimly remembered capacity, as a child, to commit a similar act of betrayal.

Winston is frequently disturbed by the memories of his mother and sister. When Julia shares a gift of chocolate with him, it harkens a distant memory: “[A]t some time or another he had tasted chocolate like the piece she had given him. The first whiff of its scent had stirred up some memory which he could not pin down, but which was powerful and troubling” (127-8). In what has become a recurring motif in the text, Winston avoids the recollection of this potentially painful memory:

[T]here was still that memory moving around the edges of his consciousness, something strongly felt but not reducible to definite shape.... He pushed it away from him, aware only that it was the memory of some action which he would have liked to undo but could not. (128)

Winston fears that he was central in his mother’s disappearance, which is revealed to him in a dream, and he relates it to the sleepy Julia: “Do you know [...] that until this moment I believed that I had murdered my mother?” (167). When she asks him why, he reconsiders and replies “I didn’t murder her, not physically” (167). This realization leads him to recall his last memory of his mother and sister: “One day a chocolate ration was issued. There had been no such issue for weeks or months past. He remembered quite clearly that precious little morsel of chocolate” (169-70). When Winston’s mother compromises with the demanding young Winston by taking no chocolate for herself, and giving him three quarters of the chocolate, he is still not satisfied, and steals the other quarter from his starving infant sister. When Winston’s mother calls to him “[c]ome back! Give your sister back her chocolate!” (170), Winston “stopped, but he did not [go]

back. His mother's anxious eyes were fixed on his face.... He turned and fled down the stairs, with the chocolate growing sticky in his hand. He never saw his mother again" (170). This scene brings to mind the scenario in which a rodent, having stolen a piece of food, turns to assess the danger of being pursued before continuing to make its hasty retreat. This painful memory of Winston's mother would almost appear to be the haunting, suppressed memory, except that he reveals that, even in recalling this scenario, "he was thinking about the thing, he did not know what it was that was on the point of happening" (170), but the theft of chocolate can hardly account for Winston's stated belief that he has 'not physically' murdered his mother. There is something over and above the mere theft of the chocolate—which given Winston's youth and his hunger is not so serious a crime, and more an act of selfishness than betrayal—which is a further final memory of his mother and sister that is too terrible for Winston to face.

Given Winston's record of continual betrayal, and the novel's emphasis on family betrayal by children, the idea of Winston having betrayed his mother and sister after the scene of the stolen chocolate is a distinct possibility. At one point, Winston reveals that both his mother and father "must evidently have been swallowed up in one of the first great purges of the 'fifties" (31). But elsewhere Winston has a very revealing dream where another truth is revealed:

At this moment his mother was sitting in some place deep down beneath him, with his young sister in her arms [...] Both of them were looking up at him. They were down in some subterranean place—the bottom of a well, for instance, or a very deep grave—but it was a place which, already far below him, was itself moving downwards. They were in the saloon of a sinking ship, looking up at him through the darkening water [...] He was out in the light and air while they were being sucked down to death, and they were down there *because* he

was up here. He knew it and they knew it, and he could see the knowledge in their faces. There was no reproach either in their faces or in their hearts, only the knowledge that they must die in order that he might remain alive, and that this was part of the unavoidable order of things. (31-2)

This dream reveals a rare moment for Winston, one in which he explores the causal relationship between the death of his mother and sister, and his own escape from their fate; Winston has not merely escaped, but his escape is made at their expense: “they were down there because he was up here.” This causal relationship is stark and revealing: “He could not remember what had happened, but he knew that in some way the lives of his mother and his sister had been sacrificed to his own” (32). One must wonder how such a key moment in Winston’s memory could have been forgotten, especially since it is so seminal to his continuing guilt. The use of punctuation in the dream is, once again, quite telling. As the description moves towards the truth, describing the environs of Winston’s mother and sister as being “subterranean” and like “a very deep grave,” he leaves off immediately with a dash and develops the far more pleasing metaphor of a ship. Winston’s inability to continue to ponder his mother and sister’s literal deaths leads to a more euphemistic metaphor that frees him from the full impact of his guilt, and subsequent grief.

The ship metaphor, itself, becomes a recurring and telling motif in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The propaganda film where the prole mother and child huddle together as they are bombed is the earliest and most obvious example of the ship motif, and has already been discussed in relation to Winston’s feelings about his mother’s value system to which he feels unequal. Another instance of Winston’s use of nautical imagery occurs when he recalls a melee in the prole quarter. Originally thinking that there was a riot that

was beginning the proletarian revolution, he remarks that it is only “two or three hundred women crowding round the stalls of a street market, with faces as tragic as though they had been the passengers on a sinking ship” (73). The metaphor of the ship makes little sense in this urban environment, but is more easily explained in connection with the metaphor of the sinking ship in Winston’s dream. In the final use of the ship metaphor, Winston sums up what the image of the ship means to him:

It struck him that in moments of crisis one is never fighting against an external enemy, but always against one’s own body [...] [I]t is the same, he perceived, in all seemingly heroic or tragic situations. On the battlefield, in the torture chamber, on a sinking ship, the issues that you are fighting for are always forgotten, because the body swells up until it fills the universe, even when you are not paralysed by fright or screaming with pain, life is a moment-to-moment struggle against hunger or cold or sleeplessness, against a sour stomach or an aching tooth. (106)

So while the woman in the film demonstrated great fortitude in the face of certain death, Winston is unlike her in that he is one who cowardly refuses to face adversity, and looks for any way to better his own position rather than to suffer torment unnecessarily, as would the woman from the film, who proves far more heroic. Winston’s admission of cowardice anticipates the torture chamber where he is to betray Julia, but it also looks to the past, to his having betrayed his family in order to preserve himself. The ship motif reminds the reader of one more popular image in the text: The rat. It is a popular belief that the first to leave a sinking ship is a rat; in his capacity as a rat, Winston is the one who has been only too keen to leave the others behind to ensure his own safety, as he makes clear in the passage from quoted above.

The room above Charrington's shop becomes a substitute for Winston's mother's flat. When first Winston sees the room, the narrator explains that

[i]t seemed to him that he knew exactly what it felt like to sit in a room like this, in an armchair beside an open fire with your feet in the fender and a kettle on the hob: utterly alone, utterly secure, with nobody watching you, no voice pursuing you, no sound except the singing of the kettle and the friendly ticking of the clock. (100)

Such a memory belongs to the time before the Party invoked the thought control measures from which Winston wishes to escape; to the reader's knowledge, there has never been such a place for him, save in his mother's flat. This nostalgic feeling is to be continually repeated in the room. When Julia first arrives there, she brings the gifts of real sugar, real white bread, a pot of real jam, a tin of milk, and inner Party coffee whose smell "seemed like an emanation from his early childhood" (147). Winston's literal memory of his mother's room is revealed in a passage that is spare in its details, but which resembles the room:

He remembered the room where they lived, a dark, close-smelling room that seemed half filled by a bed with a white counterpane. There was a gas ring in the fender, and a shelf where food was kept, and on the landing outside there was a brown earthenware sink, common to several rooms. (169)

This passage reveals commonalities between the two spaces of Winston's happier domesticity: The emphasis on food—which is more abundant in the latter room, the large bed, and the gas ring in the fender. The white counterpane reveals much about the room in that it is, as "[t]he outer covering of a bed, generally more or less ornamental" (*OED* "Counterpane" 2), comforting and provides warmth, and in that it is "[a] copy, duplicate" (*OED* "Counterpane" 1-2) of his mother's flat. In a more direct moment of comparison, when Winston and O'Brien are left alone in O'Brien's apartment after Julia

leaves, O'Brien asks Winston if he has anything to say or ask, and Winston's thoughts wander to "a sort of composite picture of the dark bedroom where his mother had spent her last days, and the little room over Mr Charrington's shop" (186). There can be no doubt that the room has become a counterpane with Winston's memory of his childhood home.

In its connection with Winston's mother's room, the room becomes a prelapsarian space. Albeit that the society of Oceania is a godless one, such a clear reference is undoubtedly to the Garden of Eden. Winston remarks that "[d]irty or clean, the room was paradise" (157). This reference to paradise also recalls images of the clearing where Winston and Julia meet alone for the first time, which literally represents the postlapsarian Garden:

They came to the fallen tree that she had spoken of. The girl hopped over it and forced apart the bushes, in which there did not seem to be an opening. When Winston followed her, he found they were in a natural clearing, a tiny grassy knoll surrounded by tall saplings that shut it in completely. (125)

Despite the fact that the Garden was closed to Adam and Eve after the Fall—wherein they betrayed God's sole command, and ate the fatal fruit—here it appears to be open to the lovers. The bushes, which enclose the clearing, represent the closure of the Garden to men, while the fallen tree is an image that is intricately linked with the Fall in both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Temptation. The tree that they cross, however is not the fabled fallen tree of the Garden, but is instead the fallen tree that represents Winston's own cardinal sin: The betrayal of his mother and sister. Winston sums up his feelings of inadequacy in this space by reciting a list of his physical shortcomings: "I'm thirty-nine years old. I've got a wife I can't get rid of. I've got varicose veins. I've got five false

teeth” (126). Through his relationship with Julia, Winston is trying to overcome this fatal tree which has become emblematic of his betrayal, his greatest feature. The room takes on the less literal role of the clearing and, *ipso facto*, the Garden:

Now that they had a secure hiding-place, almost a home, it did not even seem a hardship that they could only meet infrequently and for a couple of hours at a time. What mattered was that the room over the junk-shop should exist. To know that it was there, *inviolable*, was about the same as being in it. The room was a world, a pocket of the past where extinct animals could walk. (157, italics added)

The room, unlike the one that Winston occupied with his mother and sister, is inviolate. The animal that has returned from extinction is Winston, who is trying to free himself from the guilt of having betrayed his mother and sister when in the room. The effect of the room is clearly a removal of this prior burden:

Four, five, six—seven times they met in the month of June. Winston had dropped his habit of drinking gin at all hours. He seemed to have lost the need of it. He had grown fatter, his varicose ulcer had subsided, leaving only a brown stain on the skin above his ankle, his fits of coughing in the early morning had stopped. The process of life had ceased to be intolerable, had had no longer any impulses to make faces at the telescreen or shout curses at the top of his voice. (157)

Temporarily freed from the guilt of the betrayal of his mother and sister through the paradisiacal room, Winston is able to begin to enjoy his life in the pact that he has made with Julia not to re-commit the heinous act that had troubled him for so long. The room is now like the prelapsarian Garden, but seemingly without a serpent.

Winston’s reaction to the rat, which pokes its head into the room, reminds the reader of the fallibility of that domestic space that Winston and Julia share and of how fallacious are his attempts to negate his previous betrayals. When Julia despatches the rat

from the room and explains to Winston that there was “[a] rat. I saw him stick his beastly nose out of the wainscoting,” Winston reacts with abject horror at the thought of “Rats! [...] In this room!” (151). Winston is not reacting here to the physical presence of a rat in the room, but of the symbolic threat that the rat proves to the unity that he is seeking to maintain in the room with Julia. The rat symbolically reminds Winston of his lifelong compulsion to betray, as he continues:

For several moments he had the feeling of being back in a nightmare which had recurred from time to time throughout his life. It was always very much the same. He was standing in front of a wall of darkness, and on the other side of it was *something* unendurable, something too dreadful to be faced. In the dream his deepest feeling was always one of self-deception, because he did in fact know what was behind the wall of darkness. With a deadly effort, like wrenching a piece of his own brain, he could even have dragged *the thing* into the open. He always woke up without discovering what *it* was: but somehow *it* was connected with what Julia had been saying when he cut her short. (151, italics added)

If, as would be the easy interpretation, Winston’s fear were literally only of the rats that Julia had been discussing—“They’re all over the place.... We’ve even got them in the kitchen at the hostel. Some parts of London are swarming with them” (151)—then why does Winston continually refer to this multitude of rats in the singular, rather than in the plural? Winston’s nightmare is not connected to physical rats at all, but instead to the type of behaviour that Julia was discussing when he interjected: “Did you know that they attack children? Yes, they do. In some of these streets a woman daren’t leave a baby alone for two minutes” (151). Winston’s nightmare is connected to the rat’s selfishness as it devours innocents in order to maintain itself, and ultimately to his own rat-like behaviour in having sacrificed both his mother and her baby to his own self interest.

Winston's fear that he will recommit the heinous crime that has haunted him in his dreams and waking life reveals the tempting serpent that lies within their prelapsarian space. When the rat pokes its head into the room, it reminds Winston of his own rat-like behaviour in his mother's flat which he cannot escape.

Winston betrays Julia in the most absolute sense of their pact, but so too does she betray him. As we have seen, Julia functions for Winston as a substitute for his mother and sister that he has betrayed, but Julia betrays Winston by completing the destruction of his attempt to reconstruct his childhood environment. Winston's sister, an integral part of both his childhood memories, has not been hitherto reflected in this counterpane of his childhood home. What Julia takes from Winston is the dream which he has revealed to the reader immediately before the couple take up the room:

He wished that they were a married couple of ten years' standing. He wished that he were walking through the streets with her just as they were doing now, but openly and without fear, talking of trivialities and buying odds and ends for the household. He wished above all that they had some place where they could be alone together without feeling the obligation to make love every time they met. (146)

What Winston truly wants is for Julia and him to be a couple stable enough to care for uncorrupted children.

The room becomes a family space for Winston and Julia. Before the two secure the room, Winston is devastated when Julia calls off a rendezvous with him:

‘It's all off,’ she murmured as soon as she judged it safe to speak. ‘Tomorrow, I mean,’
 ‘What?’
 ‘Tomorrow afternoon. I can't come.’
 ‘Why not?’

‘Oh, the usual reason. It’s started early this time.’ (145)

The ‘usual reason’ can be none other than Julia’s natural menstrual cycle which, it appears, has been an ongoing difficulty in the scheduling of the lovers’ meetings. In a society where sex is permissible only for reproduction—and where there is, therefore, no need for contraceptives—Winston should be relieved by this sign that their delicate position would not be revealed through an unexplainable pregnancy. In the month of June, however, the couple meet in the room seven times (157) without any similar interruptions. Instead, the couple’s time in the room is punctuated by repeated mentions of the matronly prole lady who is forever washing and hanging out diapers to dry:

In the sun-filled court below a monstrous woman, solid as a Norman pillar, with brawny red forearms and a sacking apron strapped about her middle, was stumping to and fro between the washtub and a clothesline, pegging out a series of square white things which Winston recognised as babies’ diapers. (144)

This woman, whose maternal presence is ubiquitous during their time in the room, introduces the idea of reproduction into the sexual relationship which develops within earshot of her continual singing. Further, in all the time that the couple inhabit the room, there is never any reference to their having missed a meeting for “the usual reason.”

The singular transformation in Julia that Winston notices when he meets her in the park after they have been released by the Ministry of Love, connects her with the matronly prole woman from the courtyard outside the room. In the moment before the Thought Police storm the room, Julia’s waist and that of the matronly prole woman are juxtaposed when Winston remarks

‘She’s beautiful,’ he murmured.

‘She’s a metre across the hips, easily,’ said Julia.

‘That’s the style of her beauty,’ said Winston.

He held Julia's supple waist easily encircled by his arm. (228)

As revealed by this passage, Julia's waist—which as has been continually referred to throughout the novel—is narrow, which is, further, evident in Winston's first description of her: "A narrow scarlet sash, emblem of the Junior Anti-Sex League, was wound several times round the waist of her overalls, just tightly enough to bring out the shapeliness of her hips" (12). Winston makes a similar observation as they approach the clearing where they have their first sexual encounter: "[H]e watched the strong slender body moving in front of him, with the scarlet sash that was just tight enough to bring out the curve of her hips" (124). The connection between the scarlet sash, and the chastity with which it is inherently connected, and Julia's slender hips and waist suggests that her shapely figure is connected with virginity and, therefore is in opposition to the matronly prole's body which was "blown up to monstrous dimensions by childbearing" (228).

When Winston meets Julia after their release from the Ministry of Love, he remarks that

He knew now what had changed in her. Her face was sallow, and there was a long scar, partly hidden by the hair, across her forehead and temple; but that was not the change. It was that her waist had grown thicker, and, in a surprising way, had stiffened. (304-5)

Julia's transformation has changed her shape from young, slender, and shapely to thick and stiff.

The change in Julia's figure to more closely resemble the matronly prole suggests that she has borne a child during her stay in the Ministry of Love. Winston describes the probable transformation of the woman through childbearing:

She had had her momentary flowering, a year, perhaps, of wildrose beauty, and then she had suddenly swollen like a fertilised fruit and grown hard and coarse, and then her life had been laundering, scrubbing, darning, cooking, sweeping,

polishing, mending, scrubbing, laundering, first for children, then for grandchildren[...] (229)

The image of the woman's transformation resembling a 'fertilised fruit' clearly links the kind of transformation she has gone through with childbirth. When Julia appears to Winston in the room in make-up and scent, she exclaims: "I'm going to get hold of a real woman's frock from somewhere and wear it instead of these bloody trousers. I'll wear silk stockings and high-heeled shoes! In this room I'm going to be a woman, not a Party comrade" (149). This passage recalls the couple's daydream, in which "they would disappear, alter themselves out of recognition, learn to speak with proletarian accents, get jobs in a factory, and live out their lives in a back-street" (159). Julia's attempt to resemble a prole, in the first example, is paralleled with Winston's remark about the prole woman, that "[o]ne had the feeling that she would have been perfectly content, if that June evening had been endless and the supply of clothes inexhaustible, to remain there for a thousand years, pegging out diapers and singing rubbish" (148). Julia's attempt to escape the Party lifestyle, and her attempt to adhere to the proletarian lifestyle, suggests that she too would be happy in such a scenario. As Julia's shape has transformed from the juvenile, slender, curvaceous form to thick and stiff, it is clear that it is suggested that Julia has achieved her transformation to resemble the prole woman, but she has transformed, not to "wildrose beauty," but instead has become "suddenly swollen, like a fertilised fruit and grown hard and coarse." From the fact that the couple has met seven times without contraception in June and never been interrupted by "the usual reason" (145), the remarkable transformation that Julia has gone through, and her resulting similarity to the old prole woman, it is possible that the narrator is suggesting that Julia has become a mother in the Ministry of Love.

Because Julia appears to Winston without her child and makes no mention of it, and because of the hopes that Winston has had in rebelling against the system and easing his conscience through rebuilding his idealized childhood nuclear family, it is entirely possible that Julia's betrayal of Winston has been that she has betrayed their child, just as Winston has betrayed her. The final meeting between Julia and Winston in the park takes place in a scene that is rife with imagery of infertility: "It was in the Park, on a vile, biting day in March, when the earth was like iron and the grass seemed dead" (304). The description of the dead landscape, reminds the reader that the landscape, like the youthful Julia, was once not like iron with live grass; the park is paralleled with Julia, who like the once-fertile park has transformed into a "thicker" and "stiffened" (305) version of her once nubile and shapely form. The scene is also described in abortive imagery, as the narrator explains that "there was not a bud anywhere except a few crocuses which had pushed themselves up to be dismembered by the wind" (304). These crocuses could be seen as an analogy for Winston and Julia's own rebellion that grew in a place that was prohibitive, but has been destroyed, indeed dismembered, by a greater force. Still, the image of the bud is also connected with new life, and its destruction has taken place in the location of these two lovers. Further, as the couple move into a sheltered clearing which recalls the original clearing that they met, the narrator strengthens the connection between Julia's waist and the crocuses: "The wind whistled through the twigs and fretted the occasional, dirty looking crocuses. He put his arm round her waist" (304). It is here that Winston discovers the change in Julia; by connecting Julia with the dirty-looking crocuses in this way, the narrator reinforces the original abortive imagery of the crocus buds, and in their dirtiness suggest that they have been soiled, much as Julia's child has

been forsaken by her, which soils Winston's dream. Further, just as Julia is about to admit that she has betrayed Winston, she performs an action that reinforces the abortive imagery: "She moved her clumsy shoe a few centimetres and deliberately crushed a twig" (305). This action, in which Julia destroys the twig, itself a newly formed, infant limb of a tree, immediately precedes her saying "I betrayed you" (305), which suggests that Julia's betrayal of Winston is connected to the abortive imagery of the scene and to her purposeful destruction of the twig.

As Winston gives away the secret—through his exclamation in the Ministry of Love—that he has not yet betrayed Julia to O'Brien, he attains the knowledge of a great truism, and in so doing he reveals a great deal of the inner workings of his mind to the reader: "[I]f you wanted to keep a secret you must also hide it from yourself" (294). As this essay has demonstrated, this bit of knowledge has been his principal method of self-preservation throughout his life. The sheer amount of such circumstantial evidence for both Winston's betrayal of his mother and for Julia's motherhood cannot be ignored, nor can it be understood in any other way. Winston and Julia betray each other: Winston ceases to love Julia as he wishes that her body should be interspersed with his in room 101, and, through her destruction of Winston's domestic rebellion by forsaking her child, Julia also demonstrates that she has ceased to love him. Winston's construction of a functioning domestic space with Julia is his failed attempt to un-bite the apple: Through the creation of his idealized nuclear family, Winston was attempting to ease his conscience of the burden of his having betrayed his mother and sister to the Thought Police, as Parsons's daughter did Parsons. Through the continual examples of family betrayal, Orwell's third-person limited narrator reveals both the pattern of betrayal in

Oceania, and the pattern by which Winston has betrayed his mother and sister. Due to the limited nature of the narration, the evidence for this betrayal must be circumstantial, because the narrator is unable to describe Julia's actual experience in the Ministry of Love, and can only reveal those pieces of evidence to which Winston is witness.

Winston's explicit fear of rats is linked to his own implicit rat-like behaviour. Through his work with the Ministry of Truth, Winston has continually demonstrated his ability to lie and to betray, which further links him to the rat that he fears. In the culture that exists in Oceania, Winston emerges as both critic and critical component of this culture of betrayal. Insofar as 1984 is the Year of the Rat, it is clear that, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston becomes the rat of the year.

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